ANTONIO BUERO VALLEJO AND THE DIALECTIC OF FREEDOM

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In *The Empty Space*, director Peter Brook asserts that each play has a central image, a «silhouette» that remains in the spectator's mind after performance is over, and that this image *is* the play's meaning or message (136). No image is so central to Buero's theater as is that of the prison even though in only one play, *La Fundación* (1974), is an actual prison cell seen on stage. If the playwright experiences an affinity for the idea of enclosure, immurement, or entrapment, it is because these states reflect his own condition and that of other Spaniards of his generation. The prison cell of *La Fundación* and the other closed dramatic spaces so typical of Buero's theater are metaphors for the lack of freedom in Franco's Spain. Whether physical or mental or both, these closed spaces are where the dialectical struggle between oppression and the dream of freedom that is at the core of Buero's tragic vision occurs. Indeed, the closed space represents one of the principal structuring devices of many committed playwrights of the Franco era (Ruiz Ramón 195).

Of course the idea of the trap and of characters who are «entrapped freedoms» (Sartre 287) is fundamental to post-World War II theater, as is evident in the cases of Genet, Beckett, and other playwrights who, as Carol Rosen has shown, set the action of their dramas in prisons and insane asylums (11-12). Incarceration in such settings —which, after the death camps and gulags of recent history, have an especially powerful effect on the contem-

porary viewer— is double: there is the physical prison of the confining institution (which may represent the nation or the world) and the mental prison of the self. However, whether there is an oppressive, confining set or not, the controlling image of contemporary drama is, as Rosen has demonstrated, that of the prison.

In many of Buero's plays, as in much European theater in the contemporary mode, the concept of imprisonment becomes interiorized. The mind is the site of dark truths that must be confronted, of guilt that must be faced. Such is the case in *La Fundación,* where the set is a real prison of Franco's Spain; in *Jueces en la noche* (1979), *Diálogo secreto* (1984), and *Lázaro en el laberinto* (1986) where there are no physical jails; and in *Música cercana* (1989), set in a room that suggests a place of immurement. If the struggle for freedom implies a movement out toward an elsewhere, it also signifies a journey inward, to an inner center where the individual must win a victory over the self, by acknowledging responsibility for actions committed in the past, actions that are the source of continuing anguish and guilt.

If prisons are mental in most of Buero's recent plays, which will be the focus of this study, the works of the Franco era contain many sets suggesting physical confinement or enclosure. The institution for the blind in *En la ardiente oscuridad* (1950), the dark basement apartment of *El tragaluz* (1967), and Goya's secluded *quinta* on the Manzanares in *El sueño de la razón* (1970), are all places suggesting immurement and entrapment. Strong individuals such as Ignacio of *En la ardiente oscuridad* and David of *El Concierto de San Ovidio* (1962) —where prerevolutionary France constitutes another immense prison— struggle to break the bars and to proclaim freedom, as do also, Buero's Goya and his Velázquez in *Las Meninas* (1960). These protagonists embody the dialectic of necessity and freedom that is the core of tragedy; their strength imparts a certain optimism despite their ultimate failure. However, in the post-Franco plays, where the image of the prison is even more central than in the earlier works, we shall see protagonists who accommodate to the society of their time. Juan Luis in *Jueces en la noche* (1979), Fabio of *Diálogo secreto* (1984), and Alfredo of *Música cercana* (1989), as well as to a much lesser extent Lázaro, impart a certain pessimism not seen in the plays of the Franco era. In the plays of the dictatorship, all things seemed possible; however, in the most recent post-Franco plays, the better

future, the more just society, the dream of real freedom is shown as betrayed. Nevertheless, we shall see that in all the plays of the dictatorship and the postdictatorship, between which *La Fundación* (1974) is a link, the dialectic of imprisonment and freedom is central.

The characters of *La Fundación* are prisoners who share a real cell although we do not see this cell when the curtain rises. The cell is also the outward manifestation of the inner prison to which one young inmate, Tomás, is condemned by a guilt he cannot acknowledge. When the plays begins, the action appears to occur in an elegant center for research; there is a comfortable room with a view of a sparkling landscape. At the end, the spectators find themselves in a prison cell and learn that the characters are not five eminent writers and scientists who have received grants from a «Foundation», but political prisoners condemned to death for activities against the established order. This change in our perception is the result of the change in Tomás's as he gradually overcomes his alienation to see the same reality as his cellmates. After revealing the name of a comrade, Tomás was unable to face his guilt; his mind therefore created the illusory world of the «Foundation» [1].

From the beginning, we see what Tomás sees: pleasantly furnished quarters with luxurious armchairs, television, stereo, and a luminous landscape and hear the same Rossini music he hears. Buero immerses us in a world of falsehood so that we may slowly emerge into a world of light along with the protagonist. Since we identify with him, we, too, become victims of a delusion. However, when we share also in his gradual return to lucidity, we obtain a clearer understanding of our own situation. Throughout the play the set undergoes constant modifications that reflect Tomás's discovery of the stark truth.

When Tomás's fictitious world has crumbled and reality has emerged, we are to see our own world for what it is. Asel, the most

[1] Buero explains that the depiction of prison life is based to a great extent upon his own observations: «Ninguno [de los personajes] soy yo [...] Hecha esta salvedad, cuanto se refiere a la atmósfera, a las tensiones y a las vivencias que conforman la obra, procede de una realidad directamente vivida. Por supuesto, reelaborada» (Monleón 5). Monleón suggests that, even after release from physical confinement, Buero was, in Franco's Spain, «un hombre encarcelado, un escritor que se debatía, que buscaba el modo de expresarse, en el estado propio de quien se sabe en una celda» (13).

experienced prisoner, explains that if one escapes from prison, he finds himself in another prison, from which he must exit into still another, and so on, until freedom is finally obtained. On the political level, the play constitutes an attack on Franco's Spain and other sociopolitical systems that deceive and enslave —against the oppressive «Foundations» of the world and their ideology. Even more importantly, it is a parable of the human condition, of the search for truth. The prisons of which Buero speaks are those that enslave not only the body but also the mind. He emphasizes that the journey toward truth and freedom —which is the true concern of all tragedy— must be gradual. He suggests metaphorically that it must be inward (in Tomás's case to his own past) and outward, through a series of concentric prisons from which tunnels must be opened toward an ever-brighter light.

In his final acceptance of his guilt, Tomás finds spiritual freedom. His spiritual escape is a rebirth. Carceral confinement always implies the existence of a threshold, of a passage from the inside to the beyong, in both the spiritual and physical sense. There is always the potential for freedom, and it is in the compressed prison setting that the dream of an elsewhere is most intense. However, for this dream to be realized, for the sunlit vista the young prisoner envisions in his imagination to become reality, it is first necessary to pass through the difficult tunnel, the dark and narrow passage planned by Tomás and his cellmate Lino at the end of the tragedy.

That the deceptive world of the «Foundation» continues is seen at the end when the prison cell is once again transformed into the comfortable room seen at the beginning and both the music and fictitious landscape reappear. A guard dressed as a receptionist then appears to welcome new occupants. Buero thus invites us to reenter the «Foundation» together with its new inhabitants. If we still believe that the «Foundation» exists, we are as deluded as was Tomás. Buero explains the purpose of his tragedy, speaking of «el pesimismo de salir para llegar a creer que la cárcel es una 'Fundación'... y la esperanza —¡incluso el optimismo!— de salir para comprender, y advertir a los demás, que la 'Fundación' es otra cárcel. Cuando eso se advierte, cuando se logra comunicar, las rejas se corren, la humana liberación empieza a ser realmente posible. Tragedias que se muestran para liberar, no para aplastar... Sí. Eso ha pretendido ser mi teatro, escrito frente a 'Fundaciones' que nos

deforman, o nos miman, o nos anulan» (Monleón 13). There are strong paralells between the «Foundation» and the institution for the blind in *En la ardiente oscuridad.* Doménech suggests that the school represents Franco's Spain with its lies, injustice, and violence (77).

The half-masks worn by most of the characters in *La detonación* are not unlike the façade of the «Foundation»; they, too, conceal the lies and hypocrisy that are the basis of the established political order and its power structure [2]. It is the comfortable falsehoods concealed by these masks that Mariano José de Larra, the protagonist of *La detonación,* seeks to disclose. Masks, like «Foundations», represent the avoidance of one's own truth. Now we see no bars, locks, or prison cells. However, the masks take their place; for behind the latter, self-deception keeps the conscience prisoner. Masks, like walls, not only hide but confine and restrict. Like Tomás, however, Larra —although he wears no physical mask that he can snatch off— will come to look deep within himself and to face truths he has long suppressed. The motif of masks, of course, comes from Larra's essay of March 1833, «El mundo todo es máscaras. Todo el año es carnaval».

As the curtain rises, Larra appears holding his pistol to his head. The action consists of an extended flashback as memories of the preceding ten years race through his mind in the few seconds before his suicide. We thus enter the very mind of the tormented Larra and share a time of political instability, ideological confusion, and changes that were only surface deep —as was also true in the post-Franco transition. Larra's recollections are presented in the deformed and grotesque way he now perceives them. The long flashback takes the form of a phantasmagoric delirium that we, the spectators are forced to share, just as we shared Tomás's schizophrenic delusion in *La Fundación.*

The half-masks worn by all the characters except fellow Liberal, Espronceda, and Larra's servant-valet, Pedro, represent the

[2] Iglesias Feijoo has pointed out the parallelism between Larra's efforts to unmask and Buero's to expose the lie behind the institutions that deceive us: «Las máscaras son [...] otra versión de las fundaciones que no deben prevalecer y encarnan un nuevo modo de poner de relieve la necesidad de destruir la alienación falsificadora. Des-enmascarar viene a convertirse en sinónimo de desalienar, de proclamar en altas voces que muchas cosas no son lo que parecen» (*La trayectoria* 476-77).

falsehood that Larra attacks. They fall as the satirist exposes the truth behind them. Buero thus recreates the carnaval of which Larra speaks in his 1883 essay. The latter's attacks upon Absolutists who parade as Liberals when change is in the wind were relevant to the post-Franco transition, when politicians also pretended to be what they were not. Buero's Larra, the historical conscience of his time, shows how the Moderados and the Exaltados or Progresistas were no different —as the identity, behind their mask, of the ministers of each of these parties that alternated in power suggests. The use of the same actor to play the succession of ministers, like the masks themselves, suggests that change is more apparent than real. Larra's Spain is a mascarade of Absolutist-liberal governments characterized by the same corruption, hypocrisy, and disregard for the common good. Moreover, in the words of his servant —the alter ego with whom he «maintains a half-mad dialogue» (Ilie 161) in «La nochebuena de 1936»—, Larra also attacks himself for intellectual pride and aversion to the masses that he never understood. Buero thus leads us into the mind of his Larra, showing us his sense of impotence, guilt and failure. At the end of Larra's delirium, just before he pulls the trigger, he looks at himself in the mirror and asks: «Y éste... ¿quién es? No lo sé. Ahora comprendo que también es una máscara» (190). In a brief epilogue, the servant expresses Buero's hope that the shot with which the tragedy ends will awaken the spectators. Freedom succumbed in Larra's time; it is Buero's wish, in 1977, that the same thing not happen again.

In *Jueces en la noche* the closed space is situated within the protagonist. We see the same interiorization of enclosure that occurs in the case of Larra. Once again guilt is jailer. Within the immured conscience, the memory of past and present crimes haunts the protagonist, condemning him to inner torment. The inescapable consequence of Juan Luis's misdeeds enclose and confine as effectively as do the real prison walls of *La Fundación.* This interiorization of the closed space and the absence of any oppressive asphyxiating set to suggest this space visually will be a constant feature of subsequent plays. The absence of a real prison cell, of course, heightens the connection between the character's plight and the audience's, as does the seeming normality of Juan Luis, who suffers no schizophrenic delusion as does Tomás nor delirium as does Larra.

Jueces is the drama of a former Franco cabinet member who

serves as congressman representing a centrist party in the late 1970s. In *La detonación* a series of prime ministers wears a series of different masks that conceal an identical political posture. In *Jueces,* one politician dons different masks as the times change although his ideas remain the same. *Jueces* analyzes the reality —every bit as phantasmagoric as that of Larra's day— behind the surface during the first years of Spain's evolution toward democracy. Buero shows how the façade of the new democratic legal and political system of the post-Franco transition has little to do with the content behind it and how those who make a pretense of embracing the new democratic faith disguise a politics of continuity as one of change. As in *La detonación,* party interests are only the façade concealing desire for wealth and power.

A series of four nightmares precipitated by the arrival of an ex-policeman friend who knows certain sordid events of Juan Luis's life corresponds to Tomás's delusion and Larra's delirium. Juan Luis dreams that he is judged by his victims. The first is his wife's former fiancé, a student dissident arrested for anti-Franco activities, whom Juan Luis made her believe had falsely implicated her in his actions and who later died in prison. The second is another political prisoner that Juan Luis voted to execute for unproven war crimes. Despite Juan Luis's seeming remorse, he is unable to break with the lies and deceptions of the past. He lets himself be blackmailed by the ex-policeman into keeping silent about the latter's plans to assassinate an important general in order to destabilize Spain's fragile democracy and thus provoke a coup by the Right. After the suicide of his wife, his third judge, the ex-cabinet member remains alone, definitively entrapped behind his mask.

In *Caimán,* as in the two preceding plays, we see the interiorization of the closed space. Now it is the inability of the protagonist to face reality that creates a prison, both for her and those who love her. She inhabits an isolated world of dreams and delusions that gradually closes in. What is immured in her case is her will. The closed space is symbolized by the cayman jaws from an American Indian tale. However, like the «Foundation», the cayman jaws are a symbol that refers not only to the individual protagonist but to society, paralyzed without the will to struggle for authentic freedom. In *La Fundación* we see a society toward the end of the Franco era unable to see itself for what it is —an immense prison.

In *Caimán* we see society of the transition lacking in the resolve necessary to confront new problems.

If *Jueces* constitutes a timely warning of the Fascist coup to be attempted just months after the play's première, *Caimán* shows other problems of the early 1980s: the economic crisis and increasing unemployment, political instability, social injustice, and exploitation, as well as delinquency, street violence, and terrorism. All these problems that affect the lives of Rosa and her neighbors in their poor neighborhood on Madrid's outskirts and threaten the nation's fragile democracy are symbolized by the legendary cayman. Buero depicts a society that, one critic states, «grita desde la entraña del caimán por la salvación» (López Sancho 43).

The protagonist, Rosa, whose eight-year-old daughter, Carmela, fell into an opening to the sewer left in an abandoned construction site, has never accepted the reality of the latter's death. In hallucinations that correspond to Tomás's delusion, Larra's delirium, and Juan Luis's nightmares, the mentally deranged Rosa imagines that her daughter speaks to her from a subterranean garden that is like the reproduction of one of Monet's *Water Lilies* on the wall of the dreary apartment, a painting to which Carmela was especially attracted. In the final hallucination, we see mysterious flashes of blue light and hear the daughter's words, as she suggests that she is coming through the garden to meet her mother.

In the legend of the cayman, the subject of a play Rosa is writing for the neighborhood children, an ancient chief, swallowed by a cayman, is rescued unharmed by his son. Rosa believes that, in the same way, her daughter will rescue her and her neighbors from the jaws of poverty and exploitation. «Como una madre presa en el vientre de un monstruo», states the narrator, «ella esperaba el beso libertador de su hija» (47). Rosa's husband Nestor, a union activist and political militant who, like Asel of *La Fundación*, has spent years in prison, explains that the legend of the cayman is poetry, not reality, and that Rosa can escape only through her own efforts, such as her work with the Neighborhood Center and the children. However, Rosa's refusal to accept reality finally leads to her death, when she escapes to the construction site in search of the marvelous garden where she believes her daughter awaits her.

The dim tunnel that Tomás hopes to dig under the prison represents a difficult and uncertain path to the light; however, Rosa's hole is the way to sure darkness. The prisoners' passage

proceeds up through the earth to life and to the possible realization, one day, of the sparkling Turner landscape; but Rosa's vertical tunnel leads only to death. Her refusal to accept reality, like Tomás's initial denial, is shown to be a grave error. The obstacles to freedom are not only physical but mental; the cayman's jaws represent not only threats from without but from within: «una impotencia consustancial al hombre que le impulsa a dudar y a ser inactivo, que lo posee» (Aranaz 110). To let oneself be swallowed up by the black hole is to be devoured by the cayman.

In *Diálogo secreto* the internalized prison space is suggested by the closed room to which the desperate protagonist withdraws. The latter is obsessed by fear that a lie he has lived for many years may suddenly be discovered, and the small room in which he locks himself suggests the closing in upon him of events. In addition to representing enclosure or containment, however, the small room suggests death. What the protagonist contemplates in the room is his own suicide. Terrified that his vulnerability will be exposed, he feels himself entrapped and his freedom nullified.

The parallels between *Diálogo secreto* and *Jueces* are marked. Fabio, a famed art critic who has attained wealth, power, and prestige through deception, is not unlike the ex-Franco minister who strives to reclaim his lost political position by hiding his real past and masquerading as a Democrat. The critic desperately conceals a terrible secret: he has always been color-blind [3]. «Vivir alerta ha sido mi cárcel», the critic confesses, «No soy más que mi pánico. El constante pánico de ser descubierto por todos» (85). Like Juan Luis, Fabio has made at least one victim; and there comes the moment when he is forced to face the truth: «el panorama de una vida basada en la mentira, el engaño, la farsa interminablemente sostenida» (Iglesias Feijoo, «Introducción», 14). Cosme, a young artist that Fabio detested because he was a drug addict and the lover of the critic's daughter, dies of an overdose; and the latter charges that her father's unjust criticism of him as a poor colorist led him to commit suicide. Buero permits us to share Fabio's torment. As the critic gazes at the reproduction of Velázquez's *Las hilanderas* —the subject of his current «diálogo del arte»— its brilliant colors turn into lusterless ochre and sepia,

[3] Fabio suffers from dyschromatopsia or daltonism, the inability to distinguish reds and greens.

gloomy browns and blues. These visual effects introduce the first of three «secret» or imaginary dialogues in which Fabio accuses himself, much as does Juan Luis in his nightmares.

Fabio's sense of guilt is seen, also, in his identification with Arachne in *Las hilanderas;* he imagines that Arachne's punishment was for weaving lies, that the defects she attributed to the gods were her own. This is because the errors in color that Fabio attributed to Cosme were really the critic's own. Therefore, he sees himself increasingly as the young mortal punished by the goddess. Obviously the metaphor of Arachne has implications not only for the individual but for post-Franco Spain: «una sociedad que erige a unos en jueces de los otros [...] donde se hace necesaria una mayor comprensión [...] personal para asumir las propias responsabilidades y limitaciones, enfrentándose a la verdad. Verdad que todos o casi todos tratan de enmascarar con sus personales mezquindades» (Arroyo 31) [4].

Fabio's fear of rejection by his wife Teresa if his daughter, who has learned the truth, reveals his secret, leads him to turn to suicide, acknowledging his defeat: «Palas ha derrotado a Arachne» (127). The idea of suicide has been present from the beginning of the play in the rhythmic sound that Fabio —and the audience— hear of the spinning wheel turned by the old woman in the foreground of *Las hilanderas,* who Buero, like Ortega (219), believes represents one of the three fates and who also stands, in Fabio's mind, for his mother, who died in the study. As Fabio acknowledges defeat and fixes his eyes on the figure of the old spinner who fascinates him, the door of the private study opens and the music of the «Spinners' Chorus» from Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman,* increases in volume until it becomes deafening, seemingly indicating his gathering obsession with death. Fabio's final retreat into the inner room serves a purpose similar to that of his solitary dialogues; it suggests a journey into himself. Unlike Juan Luis of

[4] Buero underscores the forces that are, to a great extent, responsible for Fabio's tragedy when he states that the play's theme is «la hipocresía vista como una fatalidad, como un destino elegido por el individuo y a la vez forzado por la sociedad» (Armiño 32). In the same interview, Buero speaks of the fatal hypocrisy of a man caught in a web of deceit «porque las angustias estructurales, sociales, le han empujado fatalmente a ello» (32). He explains that, although individuals have the capacity to make a choice, this capacity is limited «porque la sociedad está moldeada de forma férrea» and the ability to move freely behind its bars is restricted (32).

Jueces, Fabio retains the love of his wife, who saves him from suicide. However, although he expresses the hope that one day he may publicly admit his errors, he knows that this possibility is an illusion and senses that the spinners in the painting are laughing at him.

Just as Buero uses the prison cell in *La Fundación* and the cayman jaws in *Caimán,* in *Lázaro en el laberinto* he employs the image of the labyrinth, the inextrible mesh, to suggest his protagonist's lack of freedom. As in the case of *Caimán,* there is no visual representation of this image, although «El Laberinto» is also the name of the bookstore owned by the protagonist. The image of the maze, of course, has important literary associations as does the name of the protagonist. The labyrinth in which Lázaro is lost will become not only a prison but also the tomb of his biblical namesake.

Like *Jueces, Lázaro* shows the continuing presence of the past and the necessity of accepting responsability for it. Lázaro holds —and has always held— political views diametrically opposed to Juan Luis's in *Jueces.* Moreover, his culpability —or probable culpability since it is not certain— is limited to a single action. The truth Lázaro seeks to confront involves a woman, not a wife he coerced into marriage with calculated deception as did Juan Luis, but a student he loved some twenty-two years earlier (about 1964) and who was beaten —fatally, he will later learn— by *ultras* after a protest demonstration. The guilt that Juan Luis of *Jueces* and Fabio of *Diálogo* struggle to confront in nightmares and secret dialogues is clear to them. Tomás of *La Fundación,* on the other hand, blocks out his guilt, substituting a lie for the truth. Lázaro's case is different still because he remembers the past in two different ways, despite his apparent efforts to resolve his doubts. According to the first version of events, Lázaro intervened to try to save the student, Silvia, when she was brutally attacked; according to the second, he abandoned her to save himself.

Since Lázaro was subsequently kept away from Silvia by her parents and later told that they had taken her away from Spain, he could not learn which version is true: that of his valor or that of his cowardliness. He will later learn that his sister, Fina, deliberately concealed the girl's death out of fear he might fall in love and marry. Afraid of losing the security she and her children enjoy, she continues to conceal the truth even when an old friend of Lázaro tells him he thinks he has seen Silvia in the street. As

the play begins, Lázaro awaits a call from Silvia since he is sure she will contact him if she has returned.

The labyrinth in which Lázaro is lost is thus not his bookstore but the maze of memory where his doubts and fears hold him captive. Lost in his labyrinth, Lázaro imagines on several occasions a muffled telephone ring as he awaits the voice of Silvia that can «resurrect» him like his biblical namesake by helping him discover the truth about a past that weights him down like a tombstone. These auditory illusions are shared by the spectators. When Lázaro's call from Silvia does not materialize, he gradually transfers his hopes to Amparo, a young woman whom he identifies with the latter and whom he begins to see as a new Ariadne who can lead him out of the labyrinth. When Lázaro attempts to explain his dilemma to her, we see a reenactment of Silvia's beating. Buero thus lets us enter the maze of Lázaro's tormented mind as we witness opposing versions of the past that make clear the difficulty of ascertaining the truth.

Although Lázaro proposes marriage to Amparo, she rejects him. This rejection occurs in a secluded park corner with a bench bathed by reflections from a nearby pond, flashes of light that Lázaro associates with the notes of the lute played by his niece Coral. It is here, in this place that had special significance for Lázaro and Silvia and where Silvia said that the truth winked at them in glints off the water, that Lázaro is finally turned down. The last possibility of salvation seems lost as he learns soon afterwards that the phone call he awaits will never come. Lázaro thus remains alone, without Martha or Mary; Silvia has died and Amparo prepares to leave even though he entreats her to marry him and lead him like a blind man. Before her departure, Amparo reveals that she believes that fear prevented Lázaro from defending Silvia. Although Amparo loves him and would forgive him for his cowardliness, she leaves because she realizes that Silvia's ghost will always accompany him and, even more importantly, because she doubts his love for either woman. Fear prevented him from loving Silvia to the extent of sacrificing himself for her and fear prevents him from remembering the past: «El miedo. O sea, el egoísmo. Se engendran mutuamente» (149).

The play ends without Lázaro's having been «reborn»; his fears have prevented him from accepting the summons of conscience represented by the phone calls. At the end of the tragedy, the

telephone rings once again, plunging Lázaro into terror. This time, however, the ringing becomes louder and louder, awakening echoes all over the theater. After a sudden blackout they all stop simultaneously before the curtain falls. The persistent rings summon us to reexamine our own conduct. Buero's purpose is thus «ayudarnos a liberarnos de nuestros personales laberintos y ocultaciones» (Paco 43). Like the prison of *La Fundación* and like the cayman jaws, the labyrinth where Lázaro remains lost is a symbol that represents the situation of both the individual and the society of which he is a part. *Lázaro* constitutes a judgement of a society reluctant to recognize the errors of its past [5].

In *La Fundación* we see an actual prison cell. In *Música cercana* there is no cell; however, the protagonist's elegant living quarters imprison him as surely as any cell and this confinement is suggested by references to real locks, bars and bodyguards. Driven to find an escape, the protagonist pins his hopes on a route that leads, through a symbolic window, to an impossible past —a past that once could have been but was not and that now is impossible to recover. All escape is thus cut off. Having shaped his life and become dependent on it —a life of use and abuse of power— the protagonist is ultimately shaped, and more and more confined, by it. The window suggests a possible liberation but it is in reality only an illusion, an escape ultimately closed. Caught and held prisoner by his past, he finds movement toward a better future impossible. At the end he is left alone in an apartment that is a prison and whose locks suggest his final isolation.

Buero's protagonist is a ruthless executive whose fortune —from sordid deals of which he chooses to feign ignorance— permits him a life of luxury and privilege surpassing even that of the Francoist ex-minister of *Jueces*. However, having sacrificed everything for wealth and power, Alfredo, now middle-aged, experiences only emptiness. Longing for his family, his lost youth and even a boyhood love, he returns to his childhood home, which has a window that looks onto a courtyard where he hears melodies associated with a girl he once loved.

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[5] Buero states: «Lázaro, con su memoria dañada, responde a la memoria histórica del país [...]. Se trata de un doble recuerdo que está muy cerca de lo esquizofrénico sin serlo. En España, con referencia al pasado cada vez menos inmediato, hemos jugado mucho con nuestra memoria tratando de engañarnos, incluso desde la subconsciencia, como Lázaro» (F[élix] P[oblación], 37).

For Alfredo, who seeks to rescue the best of a past that is gone, time is the greatest tragedy. His preoccupation with the past is evinced by the video cassette he has made showing images of himself that depict his gradual change from birth to adulthood. Watching it, he attempts to return to a past that once included the possibility of a future with Isolina, the girl who sat at her window on the courtyard sewing and listening to the same music which occassionally still sounds.

As Alfredo looks at an image of himself at age twenty, we hear the music that transports him to the past, the same music he heard as a child when the girl's father played it on his phonograph. For Alfredo, both the music and the video are ways to access his youth. On two occasions we share his return to this past that he has lost, to the girl whom he could possibly have made his wife had he not let the opportunity slip away. As in preceding dramas of Buero, we see the mind as stage: the executive becomes lost in his memories and we see the window to his back suddenly opened by a pretty girl of seventeen, dressed in old-fashioned clothes, who sits down by the sill to sew. The charming young Isolina, who sews in the past as her magical window silently opens in Alfredo's mind, seems to invite him to experience a happiness he has never known.

Since his return home, to the house where his daughter Sandra still lives, Alfredo's dream of happiness with the latter and with Isolina has become a nightmare, which Buero, as is his custom, permits us to share. We hear Alfredo plead with his daughter not to abandon him and later reveal to her his love for Isolina: «Yo sí he sentido un verdadero amor. ¡Uno sólo! Y nunca... me atrevía a intentar que se realizase» (99). From his window Alfredo watched her grow into womanhood as she listened to the classical melodies that now transport him mentally back to the past, just as the phone calls transport Lázaro. The young Isolina represents the happiness Alfredo could have perhaps once known had he been a different sort of person. His first love is thus «el camino abandonado... el pasado perdido» (Johnston 25).

In his nightmares, Alfredo loses not only Isolina but Sandra, who, guided by René, a South American in Spain to raise money for his country's revolution, has begun to acquire a social conscience and to resent the life of privilege her father has imposed on her and the bodyguards that constantly follow her. In Sandra's mind, her father represents the corrupt society against which she

rebels and of which, at the end, she will become an innocent victim. «Y me despierto», Alfredo explains to Sandra in words that will be prophetic, «asustado... porque aquella ventana no se abre y tú te has ido» (103).

Alfredo's nightmare becomes reality with the fatal stabbing of Sandra by a drug addict in need of a fix. The telephone call from the bodyguard she eluded, although real and not imaginary like the calls Lázaro hears, will have a similar effect: it will summon Alfredo to examine his conscience. It is René who makes clear where the responsability for Sandra's death lies; he has long suspected that Alfredo and his bank are involved in «laundering» drug money. Alfredo immediately orders his son to remove their funds from the investment company involved; however, it is impossible. Alfredo is entrapped, imprisoned by the society he has helped create, a society that limits his choices and restricts his freedom. Now this world has destroyed his daughter.

It is in René, the young idealist, and in the latter's country —rather than Spain— that Buero places his hope for the future. If Alfredo lives in his own personal prison, suffering an inner torment that confines him as effectively as would physical walls, the Spain that *Música* depicts is also a prison. The «Foundation» that Buero presented in 1975 still exists. Behind the bright façade of the economic «boom», of a nation characterized by frivolous big spenders and a cult of money and material success unprecedented in Spain's history, is the reality evident in the references to bodyguards, alarms, and security systems that abound in the tragedy. The Spain of the late 1980s seen in *Música*, so attractive on the surface, has become another deceptive «Foundation» that blinds its citizens with the bright lights of material prosperity —as was the Spain of the 1970s seen in *La Fundación*, when consumerism turned into a passion that deflected attention away from lost freedom.

Alfredo's fears of losing the possibility of happines with Isolina will also become reality. After Sandra's death, the real Isolina —not Alfredo's mental image of her— appears for the first time. As her window opens, a woman appears who, although the same young girl whom he remembers, is notably aged, with wrinkles and grey hair. Half surprised, half annoyed when she sees Alfredo observing her, she frowns; then, as he softly whispers her name, she brusquely slams the window shut. Like Lázaro, Alfredo remains

alone, trapped by time, «castigado y vencido por su egoísmo» (Paco 44).

Gabriel of *Las trampas del azar* (1994), a youth of twenty-three when the play opens, is another protagonist consumed by guilt. Like Juan Luis of *Jueces,* he deceives the woman he will marry and experiences nightmares. In Gabriel's case, these nightmares involve shattered street lamps, the full significance of which will become clear only at the play's conclusion. We share Gabriel's recollections of a past that haunts him as he returns to the street where he lived as a child and tells the beggar Salustiano, who plays his violin on the corner, a strange story which, he says, happened to a friend: a boy, who was unable to sleep for the light of a nearby street lamp, broke it by throwing a loose tile from his roof. He hoped that people would think that the tile was blown off by the high winds so frequent in the area. Although he heard a faint cry after the lamp shattered, he did not investigate. Gabriel's insistence in questioning Salustiano as to whether he knows the story of what happened there eleven years earlier leads the latter to surmise that the tale is Gabriel's own.

Gabriel's character is made clear in conversations with his father, a Francoist veteran of the Civil War who is a chemist in a laboratory that supplies materials for arms, and with Matilde, the woman he loves and whose father owns the laboratory. The latter, a friend of «El Caudillo» himself, opposes the match between Gabriel and his daughter because of Gabriel's anti-government views and activities. The youth, although he attacks his father and Matilde's for profiting from a laboratory involved in producing weapons, tells Matilde that in order to win her hand, he is willing to work in this laboratory that she will inherit.

Before Gabriel's next meeting with Matilde, we see the youth once again return to the street with the lamp that obsesses him and tell Salustiano that he may use his friend's tale as the basis of a story he wants to write but that certain events seem fortuitous: that the tile reached its target and that no one learned what happened. The beggar's answer, that life is fuller of chance happenings than we think, foreshadows Matilde's startling revelation that her excessive modesty is the result of an accident she sustained as a little girl: she was cut by glass when a tile blew off Gabriel's roof and broke the street lamp. «Una horrible casualidad», she calls it. Due to some genetic defect, the scars thickened grotesquely. In

effect, Gabriel feels repugnance when he sees her shoulders for the first time. Nevertheless, he marries her.

As Part II begins, three decades have past and we see that Gabriel has adopted attitudes held by his father earlier and that the former's son, Gabi, now twenty-three, has become the rebellious youth that his father once was. This repetition of the past in the present is underscored by the marked physical resemblance of the middle-aged Gabriel to his father, as the latter appeared in Part I, and of Gabi to Gabriel when the latter was a young man. Again we hear the music played by Salustiano and see Gabriel, who is at home going over business papers, listen to —or, perhaps, recall— it with melancholy. Gabi criticizes his father, just as the latter criticized his own father thirty years earlier, for the pollution from his laboratory and factories as well as for the profits he makes from arms. Gabriel's defense echoes his own father's: the world economy would collapse without men like him.

Gabi's attacks upon his father extend to the latter's personal life for he suspects that his father has beaten Matilde. When she confesses the reason she always covers her shoulders, Gabi does not believe the tile blew loose from the roof or that his father married for love. His mother's words about Gabriel's nightmares confirm these suspicions. Gabi and Patricia, the girl the latter loves, go to see the father's old house in an attempt to discover the truth. First, however, we see Gabriel, himself, appear there for the first time in thirty years and greet the aged Salustiano, who by a strange coincidence has returned to the spot where he once played. Gabi's conclusion, that the tile was most likely thrown from the balcony, is confirmed by the beggar, who, noting the youth's interest in the lamp and his resemblance to Gabriel thirty years earlier, recounts to him the story he heard from the latter. However, Gabi's attempts to force a confession from his father fail, as the latter repeats his old story, speaking of «un maldito azar». Nonetheless, the question remains: why did Gabriel marry and why has he never been sincere with his wife? The result has been an advantageous marriage. Beneath the mask, the youthful rebel was a shrewd schemer, as his transformation into the powerful head of a firm connected to the manufacture of arms demonstrates.

If Gabriel threw the tile that caused Matilde's wounds, his son has cast his own tile: he has destroyed her last illusion, her belief that her husband loves her. Patricia accusses the youth of being as

impatient and aggressive as was his father. Gabriel once considered himself a rebel but became, in his son's words, «un trepador sin escrúpulos». Gabi, too, considers himself a rebel; however, one day he will inherit the laboratory and Patricia reminds him that it will not be enough to sell it. He must dismantle it or convert it to produce materials that sustain, rather than destroy, life. Patricia's words underscore the major idea of Buero's play when she remarks that it is as if fate, with all its nasty tricks, were laughing at them; when they think that they can reason clearly, it shows them how blind they are. «¿Seguiremos repitiéndonos, y no sólo físicamente?» she asks. «¿Como si fuésemos ellos mismos», Gabi adds, «aunque nos creamos sus jueces?» (16).

Gabriel's judgement comes at the end, after Gabi's attacks prove too much for his weak heart. As we see the middle-aged Salustiano of Part I standing on the corner illuminated by the stret lamp, Gabriel returns to the spot that obsesses him. After he remarks that he is unable to remember coming, the beggar replies that perhaps he never left. Guilt has always been his jailor. The play ends with the sound of shattering glass, just as *Lázaro* ends with the ringing of telephones. At the sound of glass breaking, the lamp that obsessed Gabriel goes out, although it is seen to remain intact. Then, when Salustiano asks if Gabriel does not hear a faint cry, the latter calls his action a child's prank and recalls that the remedied Matilde's misfortune by marrying her. However, Salustiano, describing Gabriel as a youth who was impatient and willing to do anything to get his way, suggests other motives for the union. As we next hear the cries of a young child, Salustiano speaks about the countless children who have wept at the sight of parents killed in wars made possible by laboratories like Gabriel's. Significantly the beggar suggests that Gabriel has dreamed of street lights to avoid dreaming of the victims for whose death he is responsible. As Gabriel approaches the second lamp, we again hear glass shatter and see the light go out, as we perceive cries, curses and laments that, Salustiano explains, are of women, men and the aged who are Gabriel's victims. When the final lantern shatters and its light disappears, there is only silence; no doubt the projectile fell in the zone already bombed, where all are already dead, the beggar comments. This final scene, which occurs in Gabriel's mind just before he dies, while a bit of consciousness still remains, is reminiscent of the nightmares in which Juan Luis's victims appear

in *Jueces*. Gabriel never escaped the snares of fate that entrapped him because he lacked the courage to see himself as he really was until it was too late.

The prison cell of *La Fundación*, the cayman's jaws, the labyrinth, the living quarters that are a jail in *Música*, and the snares of fate in *Las trampas* suggest a uniform vision emerging from Buero's post-Franco plays. If exit is possible (although improbable) for the protagonist of *La Fundación*, Buero's last Franco-era play, such is not the case in the other tragedies. In Buero's post-Franco theater, the central image, the «silhouette» that remains, is that of the prison from which there is no escape, at least for the protagonists. The latter are captives of themselves and of each other; the playwright depicts a society in which, for many, freedom no longer appears possible.

Nevertheless, the prison symbol carries its own contradiction within it. Like all symbols, it is potentially dynamic in that it implies reversibility. Prison walls imply an exit, and Buero's purpose is to show us this exit. For committed playwriters, to «unmask», to reveal the lies and hypocrisy behind the «Foundations» and institutions that oppress, is to issue an invitation to change. The tragic vision does not imply any sort of real pessimism but a desperate hope. Buero's tragedies reflect his understanding of the dialectical nature of history and are thus open in that they offer a degree of hope —however remote— at least for the audience, which must accept or reject the invitation that the playwright extends to collaborate in creating a better world: «El significado final de la tragedia dominada por la desesperanza no termina en el texto, sino en la relación del espectáculo con el espectador» (Buero, *Tres maestros*, 142-43).

Buero rejects the theories of Goethe, who maintains that the tragic vision has as its basis an antithesis that cannot be resolved and that any solution, or possibility of a solution, negates tragedy; of Karl Jaspers, who affirms that to suggest any sort of reconciliation is to transcend tragedy; and of Lucien Goldmann, who calls tragedy ahistorical and contrary to the concept of the future, of progress, of realized hope. The playwright explains: «Pese a la afirmación de Goldmann, la tragedia es dialéctica: lo son de modo explícito las que describen la dialéctica conciliatoria de los contrarios, motivada por actos y reflexiones libres que desatan el nudo de la necesidad; pero lo son asimismo, de modo implícito,

aquellas donde la conciliación no sobreviene, pues les están pidiendo a los espectadores las determinaciones que ellas no muestran» (*Tres maestros,* 143). Even though the play may have a conclusion that seems without any solution, it orients the theatergoer to hope: «toda tragedia es abierta (o sea dialéctica) incluida la que nos parece cerrada (o sea, antidialéctica)» (Molina 304).

The closed space is thus central to Buero's tragedies and gives them their predominant tone. However, since Buero's view of reality is dialectical, one image is insufficient to present his meaning. The total meaning is to be found, rather, in the relationship between opposing images. To each closed space, there is usually opposed an open space, which we will see, is true even though it may exist so far only in the protagonist's dreams, like Tomás's marvelous landscape in *La Fundación.* The dialectical structure of Buero's imagery clearly reveals his tragic vision, which is never devoid of hope.

In *Historia de una escalera* there is no explicit open space to relieve the confining stairway that seemingly leads nowhere. However, the next play performed, *En la ardiente oscuridad,* presents an explicit symbol that stands in dialectical opposition to the authoritarian school for the blind that is in many ways a prison: the distant spheres that the blind Ignacio glimpses in his mind's eye, the light behind the darkness, the possible liberation to which the other students, content with their world of darkness, are oblivious. There is no open space to oppose the dark basement apartment of *El tragaluz* with its claustrated inhabitants, where the only light is that which filters through the bars of the invisible window. However, the narrators from the future make clear that in another time dimension freedom does exist and the limitations of our present have been overcome. Buero's Goya, a prisoner in his *quinta,* speaks of the far-away city high up on a cliff, where the Fliers or free men live —beings he depicted in etchings and paintings.

If the closed spaces in Buero's theater reveal a playwright who is an intransigent realist, the opposing open spaces show us one who is a visionary. Buero's open spaces represent images of hope for the future. In *La Fundación* and *Caimán* these images take the form of idealized landscapes, imagined, or perhaps glimpsed in their mind's eye by his dreamer-protagonists. Whereas landscapes

are described verbally in *El sueño de la razón,* in *La Fundación* and *Caimán,* they are suggested visually. In these latter two plays, as in *Lázaro,* open spaces acquire a much greater importance than in earlier works and provide the key to Buero's dialectical vision of reality and of tragedy, which reflects it.

The marvelous Turner landscape the young prisoner Tomás sees in *La Fundación,* with its green mountains and meadows, clear sky, and sparkling silver lake, is the product of a delusion and, like the «Foundation» for scholars and scientists that he sees in place of the prison cell, is erased as he returns to reality. Nevertheless, the idyllic landscape seen through the window of the imaginary «Foundation» and accompanied by the serene Rossini pastoral functions as a symbol of freedom. Asel —an author surrogate— states to Tomás: «Nunca olvides lo que voy a decirte. Has soñado muchas puerilidades, pero el paisaje que veías... es verdadero» (241). Buero thus expresses his hope for a better future which, even though glimpsed only through the eyes of delusion, may become reality. In the dialectical process depicted metaphorically by the drama, the reality of the prison vanquishes the imaginary «Foundation». Nevertheless, the ideal represented by the luminous Turner landscape remains.

The Monet water garden that Rosa sees in her hallucinations in *Caimán* corresponds to the Turner landscape of *La Fundación.* The imaginary garden represents the freedom for which she hopes. Rosa is a poor, deranged woman and Schubert's music for *Rosamunde,* heard on several occasions, suggests her romantic nature and the unreal world she inhabits. Nevertheless, the garden is no less true, as an ideal, than Tomás's imaginary landscape. The words of both Tomás and Rosa take us beyond the fixed confines of the theater to the space glimpsed through the window or suggested by the painting, and, for a moment at least, the closed space of the prison or cayman dissolves into a new freedom that may one day become reality.

In *Lázaro* the open space that stands in opposition to the labyrinth is the park corner. In this marvelous place where the glints off the water dance, Coral finds the inner peace and freedom that elude Lázaro. This magical spot is an image that suggests the quiet center of the mind, where true liberation is to be found. At the end of the play, we hear Coral, whose figure is covered with sparkling reflections, play her lute. Then, the notes strangely cease

to sound even though she continues to play, and the phone rings begin and spread throughout the theater. Finally the stage lights dim, leaving visible only the glowing bench where she plays her silent notes. Like Lázaro, we are unable to hear the music. We, too, Buero suggests, are prisoners in labyrinths of our own making.

In *Música* there appears, to the protagonist, to be an escape to freedom, as he listens to the music that transports him to his childhood and remembers the seemingly magical window across the open courtyard where the pretty young Isolina, whom he loved, used to appear. For the middle-aged Alfredo, however, the path across the courtyard that opens in his mind is a dead end. The tunnel Tomás hopes to have the chance to excavate in *La Fundación* leads to the future; Alfredo's path leads to a past that cannot be revived. For Gabriel of *Las trampas* the only exit from the snares of fate is death.

Buero's predilection for the prison symbol is no doubt to a great extent grounded in the experiences, which he shared with other Spaniards, as a political prisioner in the early post-Civil-War period and as a Leftist whose views were in dialectical opposition to those of an authoritarian regime that lasted almost forty years. The prison image in post-war Spanish literature reflects experiences in a country that was Europe's last Fascist state and where opposition writers believed that literature could demystify and raise public consciousness. However, Buero's theather reflects not only grim realities but luminous hopes, for his structures of opposing symbols express a world view that integrates the future.

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